

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE SOUTHEAST REGION NEWS RELEASE

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NOAA Fisheries Requires Modified TEDs for Shrimp Trawlers in GA Waters to Protect Migrating Endangered Leatherback Sea Turtles

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) is closing to shrimp trawling some waters off Georgia for at least a two week period to protect migrating leatherback sea turtles beginning at 11:59 p.m. tonight. Shrimpers whose turtle excluder devices (TEDs) are modified to have an opening large enough for leatherbacks to escape may continue to operate in the closed area. If aerial surveys indicate that leatherbacks have left the area, shrimping with nets equipped with standard TEDs may resume at 12:01 a.m., May 4.

The closed area encompasses all inshore waters and offshore waters 10 nautical miles seaward of the COLREGS demarcation line, bounded by 31 degrees north latitude (approximately St. Andrews Sound, Georgia) and 32 degrees north latitude (approximately Tybee Island). Aerial surveys found high concentrations of leatherback turtles in this area, in waters where they may interact with shrimp trawlers. This action is necessary to reduce mortality of endangered leatherback sea turtles incidentally captured in shrimp trawls. Additional aerial surveys are planned to monitor the leatherbacks' migration.

"Leatherbacks, which are in the middle of their annual northerly migration, are the largest species of sea turtle," said Georgia Cranmore, chief of NOAA Fisheries southeast regional protected resources division. "They can measure up to eight feet long and three feet wide and weigh an average of 1,000 pounds. They are too large to fit through the standard TED openings so fishermen have to modify the flaps on their TEDs to allow leatherbacks to escape if they want to continue fishing."

(MORE)

Comments on this action should be addressed to the Chief, Endangered Species Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Comments may also be sent via fax to 301-713-0376. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or the Internet.

For further information contact David Bernhart at 727-570-5312, or Barbara Schroeder at 301-713-1401. For guidance on how to modify TED escape openings to exclude leatherback sea turtles, fishermen may contact gear specialists at the NOAA Fisheries Pascagoula, MS laboratory by phone 228-762 4591 or fax 228-769-8699.

NOAA Fisheries is an agency of the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The agency conducts scientific research and provides services and products to support fisheries management, fisheries development, trade and industry assistance, enforcement, and protected species and habitat conservation programs.

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